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ABSTRACT

This list of guidelines for teachers confronted with conflict situations is intended to fill a gap in the literature, which deals almost exclusively with conflict and personnel problems from the administrator's point of view. The author lists steps for teachers to follow before, during, and after a problem arises. These guidelines emphasize the importance of establishing good relations with administrative personnel, of keeping options open, and of carefully recording (and in some cases, notarizing) all interaction with the persons involved in the conflict. (DS)

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Strategy For Dealing With Conflict

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Strategy For Dealing With Conflict

It is not uncommon for conflict and disagreement to arise in today's ever changing educational scene. In recent years, changing goals, objectives and types of programs offered makes for an educational environment with less rigidity than ever experienced in the history of education. Implementation of media, systems planners and computers have brought individuals to the profession with new perspectives on education. These new aspects of education and the traditional teacher/administrator problems require guidelines for the protection of everyone in conflict situations. Since the literature has addressed itself regularly and in detail to the administrator's role in personnel problems, this article is directed toward the teacher's role in conflict or disagreement situations.

Suggestions expressed in this article are intended for people who feel they have been wronged and wish to correct a situation or for those individuals who merely want to clear their name prior to resignation. One's conscience and ethical code should influence and guide an individual's decisions regarding acceptance and implementation of any of the following.

BEFORE THE PROBLEM

Be the best at your work. Make yourself invaluable to the operation.

. Be aware of all school policies and follow each conscientiously.

. Attend and be involved in activities of the governing body of the school system.

. Know what is high on the reward system list and gear your behavior towards attaining high approval goals. If the goals are not those you can accept and support in good conscience, try to change them or seek employment elsewhere.

. Be seen with and/or drop the names of influential persons who have direct or indirect influence with the school administration. Obvious exploitation of such persons is more a detriment than a help before, during and after a problem surfaces.

. Know personally several people in the mass media; their support may prove invaluable.

. Keep a record of your daily activities. This can be recorded easily on a calendar with an hourly appointment schedule.

. Systematically but discretely make administrative decision-makers aware of your professional accomplishments.

DURING THE PROBLEM

. Be extremely calm and courteous during this tense period.

. If possible, resolve problems with your immediate supervisor before escalating them to higher administrators.

. Strictly adhere to grievance procedures according to the established guidelines.

. Maintain proper perspective of the problem. Do no let yourself be coerced or brainwashed into

believing your philosophy or acts were wrong. However, if you are wrong, the best strategy is to admit it.

. Keep an accurate and up-to-date log of all activities related to the problem. Consider periodically having the log notarized. Having logs, memorandum and other documents notarized protects the teacher from after-the-fact accusations. This formal procedure lends a credible time-base to your thinking process and record of events.

. Have your current personal interpretation of a problem situation and all formal documentation related to the problem notarized.

. Consult with a local ombudsman if such services are available.

. Develop a systematic but flexible strategy for resolving the problem.

. Politely resist all informal communication regarding the problem with the school administration. If this is impossible, respond formally to all informal discussions. Provide an accurate and complete interpretation as you understand the informal communication. Include, as nearly as possible, direct quotes. Carbon copies should be provided to only persons in attendance. Request,in writing, a formal confirmation that your letter was received. If this request is not met, have your letter notarized immediately and delivered by registered mail.

. Limit and control all informal communication with other staff and teachers regarding the problem.

. Contact someone outside the school system in which you are employed who has had a similar problem. Listen to their experience and advice.

. Consider forming an outside group of three or four non-teachers to assist as strategy planners and personal consultants. Obviously, this group should be trustworthy and able to more objectively analyze the problem. Husbands, wives or close friends are seldom objective enough to provide meaningful assistance.

. Contact your local, state and national associations for assistance.

. If the situation warrants, consider securing legal services. This action should be covert or overt depending on the situation.

. If you must actively solicit support from your peers, it most likely will not be the kind of sincere assistance needed.

. Avoid statements which you may have to retract at a later date. Often such ultimatums ("I will never ...") tend to force one into a situation where there is no compromise. Unless you have the resources and flexibility to make ultimatums good, you will be effectively neutralized in your current position.

. Avoid making threats. If this seems impossible, try to couch them as possible contingencies or possible actions.

AFTER THE PROBLEM

. There are no victories in personnel problems, so forget the situation and direct all energy toward new worthwhile goals.

. Learn from this experience so that future problem situations can be avoided.

. Be sure that your personnel records reflect the final resolution attained.

The suggestions presented here are not intended to be an all inclusive panacea. Several "What if ..." questions can be raised regarding each suggestion depending on the individual problem situation. These legitimate concerns are answered as one works through the suggested guidelines with consultants, lawyers and professional associates. Many administrator/teacher problems can be better resolved with less confusion and emotional upset if some of these guidelines are thoughtfully considered and implemented. However the above suggestions should be modulated according to the degree of the problem and not considered a total plan of action for every administrator/teacher conflict.

Note: This paper is similar in content to the one published by the author under the title, "Coping With Administrative Problems: A Survival Kit For Librarians," in U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D* Librarian, No. 17 (Fall 1975):9-10.